

THE MIND'S EYE: A REVIEW OF THE PRESS

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NIXON. The percipient Renata Adler, author of one of 1976's best books, Speedboat, friend of John Doar, and a member of the impeachment inquiry staff, spins an intricate web of unthinkable thoughts about the real crime which led to Richard Nixon's resignation (Atlantic, December 1976). Comparing the Church Committee's investigations of government abuses by past presidents with the impeachment proceedings, she concludes that "it becomes less and less clear why the Nixon presidency had to end." No compelling case for High Crimes and Misdemeanors was made. Hence, why did Nixon resign? The real crime, she thinks, was bribery. Money of dubious provenance from Rabbi Korff and money "loaned" by Robert Abplanalp and Bebe Rebozo was "in fact his own, which he cannot, for one reason or another, reach any other way." Where the money probably came from--South Vietnam--is the shocker, and Nixon left the White House to forestall disclosure.

GEORGE KENNAN'S WORLD. Access to the luminous, uncomplicated mind of George Kennan is provided by The New York Review of Books in the transcription of a public television interview by Martin Agronsky ("A Different Approach to the World: An Interview," January 20, 1977) which sparkles with challenging insights into U.S. problems vis-a-vis Russia, Africa, the Middle East, energy (if we expect to be of real help in solving the Arab-Israel problem, we should "move smartly" toward conservation and alternative power sources, particularly solar), China, the nuclear arms race, the SALT talks, and international morality. He deplores the double standard by which we ask the world to judge Russia and ourselves. Discounting Russian intentions, we base our foreign policy solely on Russian military capabilities, while expecting other nations to overlook our vast capabilities and take into account only our good intentions. Selling enormous amounts of weapons to Iran is "quite mad. . . . Can you imagine the outcry that would have arisen in this country," he asks, if Russia had put two to three billion dollars worth of arms and tens of thousands of instructors into Mexico in the last two or three years? Citing our possession of 25,000 to 30,000 nuclear warheads, he wonders, "What in the world are we thinking of? . . . No one in the world, including our finest statesmen . . . is good enough, wise enough, steady enough to have control over the volume of explosives that now rest in the hands of this country." His view of China is admiring and cautious. "I think that the Chinese, in a way, have had our number for several decades back. . . . (They) are very different people from ourselves. I have no disrespect for them. I think they're probably, man for man, the world's most intelligent people, very imaginative, a talented and great people; but I think also that they don't particularly like foreigners. . . . and I think they are capable, along with their great delicacy of behavior, of great ruthlessness when you least expect it. I would feel that Americans ought to be very careful in their dealings with them." Have we met our own standards of morality in international affairs? "No. . . . we have, in many ways, let down our traditions in recent years. I don't think we did it with sinister intent, but I think we did."

POETRY IN A NURSING HOME. In the same issue of NYRB Kenneth Koch writes a step-by-step description of a successful course in poetry writing which he directed for patients in their seventies, eighties, and nineties in the American Nursing Home, New York ("I Never Told Anybody," January 20, 1977). The poetic material was the long lives that old people can look back on. The model was the unrhymed, nonmetrical work of such poets as Walt Whitman, D. H. Lawrence, and William Carlos Williams. The result was the discovery of riches in sad, barren lives. "These things were in our students but, I suspect, for the most part, hidden. Writing poems, they discovered them and made them into art. . . . They hadn't told anybody, and thus nobody had ever

heard it, and neither they nor anyone else knew that it was in them to tell it, because they had never written poetry."

ALIENATION. A thoughtful philosophical and historical study by Louis Dupre in The Yale Review ("The Religious Crisis of Our Culture," Winter 1976) is heavy going but well worth looking at if you are trying to come to terms with cultural disarray, the slipping away of values, and the loss of meaning in a frighteningly empty world. Dupre calls the crisis religious in the sense that "religious" refers to the need for a transcendent dimension in human existence, in whatever form or shape it may be expressed. Institutional religion is not his concern; in fact, in his view, it is part of the problem because it is as secularized as society itself. The loss of transcendence began--imperceptibly and contradictorily--2500 years ago with the Greeks, when, putting the mythic view of the world behind them, they set Western civilization in motion with the invention of methodical thought. The death of God was fore-ordained when philosophy, applying such terms as First Cause and Author of nature, destroyed transcendence by making God a part of the natural system. Insofar as philosophical analysis is a way of gaining control over the world ("Knowledge is power"), its natural children were the scientific and technological revolutions and the loss of the very freedom which the theory of moral autonomy asserts is man's essence. We lost freedom at the moment when we thought we had gained it, because the next logical step after control of the world is the control of men by other men. "How can our culture regain its heart?" There is no road back to the past. We must first face the situation with patience, hope, and courage. "It is difficult to accept what we have become--lonely, dispersed, isolated--and yet to abide the return of meaning." What is to be faced is the fact of our atheism. To overcome the crisis requires the reversal of the alienating attitudes which caused it. We are suffocating for lack of spiritual space. "The space for freedom is created by transcendence. What we need, then, is to adopt attitudes in which transcendence can be recognized again."

LEONARD FEENEY. Once a bright poetic star of the American Jesuits and chaplain of St. Benedict's Center, Cambridge--a haven for Catholic students of Harvard, Radcliffe, and other "secular" colleges in the vicinity--Fr. Leonard Feeney fell into ecclesiastical disrepute just after World War II. His overliteral interpretation of the ancient doctrine, "Outside the Church there is no salvation," earned him excommunication. It also brought him fervid followers and led to the foundation of the Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on a 146-acre plot of land in Harvard, Massachusetts. They were, perhaps, the first of the Jesus people, by two decades. In the 1950's Fr. Feeney's Slaves were familiar figures throughout the Northeast, preaching the one true salvation and selling its literature. Thereafter, obscurity. John Deedy, managing editor of the Commonweal, brings the story up to date (January 7, 1977). The ordeal with Rome ended in 1974 when Fr. Feeney, now 80 years old, and 29 members of his community made a simple profession of faith without recantation or disavowal of their former ideas on salvation. The group, with two members now ordained to the priesthood, is working towards canonical acceptance into the Order of St. Benedict and the foundation of a Benedictine abbey or priory. Happy ending? For some, but not all. Eighteen members refused the 1974 profession of faith, occupy part of the Harvard property, and litigation is pending.

The Mind's Eye is planned as a monthly publication with summaries of noteworthy articles of general interest in the current periodical press. Members of the college community are invited to participate as editors and contributors, and suggestions as to coverage, format, and content are sought. Editor of this issue: Charles McIsaac.